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Mahler the Enigma: Progressive Composer, Traditional Conductor

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MAHLER THE ENIGMA:
PROGRESSIVE COMPOSER, TRADITIONAL CONDUCTOR

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Honor Scholar Thesis
April 13, 2015
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Introduction

When Gustav Mahler began his career, Richard Wagner and his music dominated the cultural sphere of the latter half of the nineteenth century. With the intent of determining the future of German art music, Wagner penned his musical ideas, some radical but mostly influential. His ideas stemmed from programmatic music, in which extramusical elements played heavily into the composition. The term ‘extramusical elements’ refers to the idea that music derives from specific origins; in other words, external stimuli, such as folklore, a narrative tale, or an image, directly influence musical material. Instrumental works that hinged on extramusical elements were deemed programmatic music because of the need for program notes to explain narratives and the composer’s intent. A true German speaking on true German music, Wagner transformed the musical world. Mahler’s music is evidence of the Wagnerian influence; he often used folk tales and personal narratives as sources for his compositions.¹

Mahler could not make a substantial living off of composing and he found an interest and a talent for conducting. Taking a more academic and intellectual approach to conducting music, Mahler had an interest in objective formalism and its origins in the rise of a new Enlightenment. Eduard Hanslick, a music critic and a music historian at the University of Vienna, took up the idea of absolute music, a term coined by Wagner himself.² Essentially, absolute music countered Wagner’s core concept that music depended on extramusical elements, and Hanslick argued that listeners would create for themselves aesthetic conclusions about the music regardless of any

¹ The major English-language studies of Mahler as a composer include Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, Vol. 1-4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); a collection of essays in *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kurt and Herta Blaukopf, *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991).

² On Hanslick see *On the Musically Beautiful* as translated and edited by Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986) and a recent publication *Rethinking Hanslick: Music, Formalism, and Expression* edited by Nicole Grimes, Siobhan Donovan, and Wolfgang Marx (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2013).

extramusical intention. Under the influence of Hanslick's tenure as Vienna's most respected music critic, Mahler succeeded as a conductor because of his refreshing performances. With a focus on musical form, Mahler presented to the Viennese audiences new ways to listen to old music.

Mahler's paradoxical position as both a progressive composer in line with Wagner and traditional conductor in line with Hanslick, affected his reception during his time in Vienna and New York City. In essence, Mahler balanced the tonal ideas of program music with the intellect of absolute music. Because of this dichotomy, Mahler did not conform to the musical world of Vienna. During his engagement in New York City, his ideas of music also contended with the budding American musical culture. Because Mahler spent the latter years of his career mostly in Vienna and New York City, these cultural hubs represent an interesting dichotomy: Music of the Past and Music of the Future. Music of the past refers not to the strict appreciation of Mozart or Bach, but rather the musical aesthetics based on Enlightenment thinking and a resurgence of formalism. Music of the future, in contrast, featured musical drama and extramusical elements. In many ways, Mahler parallels the Roman god Janus: he stands historically as the transition between Music of the Past and Music of the Future.

My study of Mahler as both a progressive composer and conservative conductor will follow his career in Vienna and New York City, emphasizing cultural history and contextualizing the environments in which Mahler found both success and failure. The reception history will explain why he faced opposition in both major cities. Understanding the Vienna in which Mahler received his formal training, the discussion emphasizes the philosophical ideas of Hanslick and Wagner within the cultural context. Additionally, the sociopolitical complications of anti-Semitism complicated Mahler's tenure in Vienna. Recognizing Mahler as an outsider because of

his Jewish heritage gives a possible answer as to why he would leave prestige in Europe for New York City. In America, critics played a large role in the development of the high art culture, and an analysis of their reviews offers insight about the budding American aesthetic. Still deep in the throes of Wagnerism, America was not the enlightened bastion of Vienna, and Mahler often challenged critics and audiences with his performances as the New York Philharmonic's conductor.

For the most part, scholars have studied Mahler's career as a composer, because composition study offers clear documentation; however, Mahler's career as a conductor has not been fully integrated with the composition study. Work focusing on Mahler's conducting career mostly focuses on his time in Vienna. My study will focus on the New York City reviews of Mahler's conducting at the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic Society. The reviews reflect the various aspects of Mahler's influences, including the Romanticism of Wagner and Formalism of Hanslick. At the center of this paper, the cultural history coupled with the reception history will present a nuanced understanding of Mahler's successes in America. In Vienna, Mahler benefited from the support of the influential Hanslick, but in New York City he did not have the same type of endorsement. The result of this study is to see the continuation of Mahler's dual direction. Given the worlds in which he worked and thrived, we will come to understand Mahler the enigma.

Mahler in Vienna, 1897-1907

At the center of the Habsburg Empire, Vienna reigned as the cultural and political hub of the Austro-German nation. It attracted tourists yearning for a glimpse into its historic past and rural immigrants longing for economic change. In 1875, Gustav Mahler entered the Conservatory at the University of Vienna, and would soon find himself immersed in a musical and cultural world where he was at once an outsider and champion. (See Figure 1 for portrait.) As a Jewish Bohemian, Mahler existed as an outsider to Vienna, but he flourished in the city where he would fall in love and lay down his musical roots; the city that could abandon him, but he himself could never abandon. Vienna, as Leon Botstein calls it, stands as the “indispensible scaffolding” of Mahler’s career.³ As a prelude to Mahler’s time in New York City, it is essential to examine the musical, social, and political environment that affected Mahler’s growth as a composer and as an individual; the critics, especially the influential Hanslick with his followers, who shaped Mahler’s career as a conductor; and the elements that framed Mahler as an outlier of the community.

Musical Life in Vienna

The major musical institutions, the Philharmonic Orchestra and the Hofoper, were largely patronized by the state. Built in 1869, the large theater located on the Ringstrasse housed the Hofoper for nightly performances, barring the July holiday, Christmas, and Holy Week.⁴ All the operas were sung in German, with exception for the French opera tradition. Befitting the time, Wagner operas were prominent at the Hofoper; Hans Richter, its preeminent conductor before

³ Leon Botstein, “Gustav Mahler’s Vienna.” In *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

⁴ Botstein, “Gustav Mahler’s Vienna,” 67.

Mahler, conducted the Viennese premiere of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.⁵ The Court Opera symbolized the strong German presence in elite art music. The Vienna Philharmonic acted as the fully professional, full-time orchestra of the Hofoper.⁶ Performing Wagner, Brahms, and Bruckner under Richter's direction, the Philharmonic like the Hofoper exemplified German nationalism and pride. Elite music, housed in the opera houses and the symphony halls, kept a consistent standard—in that it fit into the mold of traditional European art music.

Figure 1. Portrait of Gustav Mahler⁷



⁵ Botstein, "Gustav Mahler's Vienna," 47.

⁶ Botstein, "Gustav Mahler's Vienna," 45.

⁷ Fig. 1. Moriz Nähr, *Gustav Mahler*. 1907, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991. Plate 26.

Prior to Mahler's arrival, the Hofoper faced stagnation under its director, Wilhelm Jahn. Favoring lighter fare, Jahn championed French grand opera and early Romantic German repertory, works with spoken dialogue (or *Spieloper*). The Hofoper hardly performed Italian works, making exceptions for Verdi, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and *I Pagliacci*.⁸ After seventeen years at the Hofoper, Jahn began to receive criticism on the repertory; the critics and the public wanted a "heavier operatic diet."⁹ In an article for the *Österreichische Volks-Zeitung*, Balduin Bricht explains the need for rejuvenation in the Hofoper: "Wilhelm Jahn, the exceedingly meritorious restorer of our Opera Theatre, has in recent years become exhausted and tired, perhaps at any rate because the financial management set over him has often crossed his artistic plans."¹⁰ Audiences craved new German music dramas, but their appetite was not satiated; Vienna hardly ever premiered new works in the classical music tradition. As a genuine or derisive courtesy to Jahn's tenure, the *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* later published a nod to his career:

All things considered, the 17 years of Jahn were a heyday for the Vienna Court Opera, standing out in sharp contrast to their immediate past, in which the public unlearned opera-going. . . . It will remain unforgotten that he raised the Vienna Court Opera back to the height of its old fame, that he assembled a repertory and an ensemble which no other operatic stage . . . could come near to equaling.¹¹

The reviewer commends Jahn for his prolific and extended term at the Hofoper, and his statements regarding the public's "unlearned opera-going" could correlate with either the positive overflow of operagoers or the decline in audience etiquette. After giving Jahn his due credit, the reviewer ends sarcastically, "Wilhelm Jahn deserves to be commemorated in the Court

⁸ Sandra McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna 1896-1897: Critically Moving Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 69.

⁹ McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna*, 72.

¹⁰ McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna*, 73.

¹¹ McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna*, 76-77.

Opera by being immortalized by a marble bust in the foyer”—as if a marble bust were enough to pay homage to Jahn’s tenure.

The nineteenth century saw an escalation in nationalism, and Vienna took pride and ownership of its historical musicians. The city boasted patriotic events for musical figures that it claimed as its own; there were centennial commemorations for Haydn, and masses of citizens attended the funerals of Franz Schubert, Anton Bruckner, and Johannes Brahms. The Viennese egotism fed into popular musical tastes, and Johann Strauss II achieved success by delivering nationalistic music. Nearly a decade before Mahler’s arrival in Vienna, Strauss’s *An der schönen blauen Donau* (*The Blue Danube*) premiered in 1867, receiving popular acclaim. *The Blue Danube* exemplifies the prevalent musical taste of the public: nostalgic, simple, and accessible. The latter half of the 19th century still boasted a Romantic taste in music, and many longed for the prolongation of the Romantic sensibility in an ever-modernizing world. Strauss’s popularity spoke for the general desire to maintain the wistfulness innate in the common interpretation of Romanticism. According to Eduard Hanslick, Strauss’s famous waltz “not only enjoys unexampled popularity; it has also achieved a unique significance: that of a symbol for everything that is beautiful and pleasant and gay in Vienna. It is a kind of patriotic folk song without words.”¹² In *The Blue Danube*, the Viennese continued to revere Romantic aesthetic, and they came to hold the river itself as a national symbol. As a harbinger of music’s future, Mahler entered Vienna as an outsider to both its musical life and the society-at-large.

While the musical life of Vienna was focused on a nationalistic tradition, the Habsburg Empire consisted of numerous culturally diverse populations. With the influx of Bohemian and Moravian immigrants, Vienna stood as a nucleus of hope for the largely rural empire; here,

¹² Eduard Hanslick, *Vienna’s Golden Years of Music: 1850-1900*, trans. by Henry Pleasants (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 326.

people of different backgrounds could come together under a single Austrian rule. Mahler was himself an immigrant from Bohemia, but he was not alone in his pilgrimage. In his first year at the Conservatory, nearly two-thirds of the students hailed from places outside of Vienna within the Habsburg Empire. Growing up in a German-speaking minority in Bohemia, Mahler was an “elite” Jew in Vienna.¹³

Mahler and Hanslick

In his pseudo-memoir, *Vienna's Golden Years of Music*, Hanslick writes of the city's pre-revolution artistic life: “Cut off from all great intellectual interests, the Vienna public abandoned itself to diversion and entertainment. Not only did the theaters flourish; they were the chief subject of conversation and occupied the leading columns of the daily newspapers.”¹⁴ Like Mahler, Hanslick was an immigrant to Vienna but enjoyed a prolific career in the musical scene. In the 1840s, Hanslick started his career as music critic in Prague. He moved to Vienna in 1846, two years prior to the March Revolution, to receive his Doctorate of Law. Taking public office, he transferred to the town of Klagenfurt and despised his position, so he moved back to Vienna in 1852 for good.¹⁵ By 1855, he was regularly contributing to *Die Presse*, the major periodical of Vienna, which later evolved into *Die Neue Freie Presse* in 1864. According to Mahler's biographer, Henry-Louis de La Grange, the *Neue Freie Presse* was “the most influential single factor in forming public opinion,” especially for the educated bourgeoisie and society elites.¹⁶ When Hanslick moved to the Vienna permanently, he had previously written for periodicals in Prague, and he had already established himself as a music critic with an influential voice across

¹³ Botstein, “Gustav Mahler's Vienna,” 18.

¹⁴ Hanslick, *Vienna's Golden Years of Music*, 6.

¹⁵ Hanslick, *Vienna's Golden Years*, 11.

¹⁶ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, Vol. 2, 4.

the Habsburg Empire.¹⁷ In addition to his role as a principal voice in the Viennese music circle, Hanslick accepted a position at the University of Vienna in 1861 as the instructor of music aesthetics and history—the first in history.

The Conservatory hired Hanslick because of his aesthetic views laid out in his treatise, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (On the Musically Beautiful)*, first published in 1854. (See Figure 2 for portrait.) Kevin C. Karnes calls the study “the first polemical tract on music aesthetics . . . , the first such book to suggest that neither the language of feeling nor the arguments of metaphysics can account for music’s meaning and beauty.”¹⁸ During the height of musical Romanticism by the mid-1800s, academia pressed for a return to the empiricism reminiscent of the Enlightenment movement of the previous century. For the University of Vienna, Hanslick represented a promise of heuristic appreciation in music, in that people could understand musical aesthetics by experiencing music for themselves. In the foreword to the Eighth Edition of *On the Musically Beautiful*, Hanslick argues: “The beauty of a piece of music is specifically musical, i.e., is inherent in the tonal relationships without reference to an extraneous, extramusical context.”¹⁹ The treatise urged readers to appreciate music for its sonic artistry; music resides not in a realm outside of emotional understanding, rather in a realm of understood tonal relationships. Essentially, Hanslick advocated a revival of absolutism, where formal analysis formed the core understanding and enjoyment of music. Because his philosophy directly contradicted the Romanticism perpetuated by Wagner and the New German School, Hanslick stood as a radical in the musical world. In the scholarly world, Hanslick merely complied with the rising tide of objective methodology. The Imperial Ministry of Education was determined to

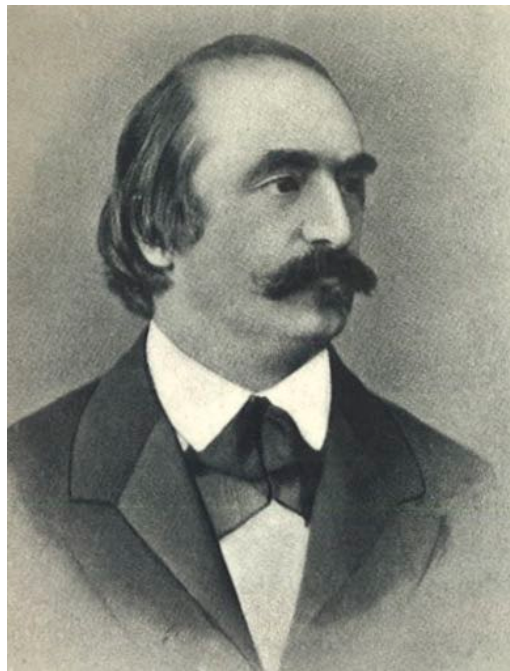
¹⁷ Kevin C. Karnes, *Music, Criticism, and the Challenge of History Shaping Modern Musical Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

¹⁸ Karnes, *Music, Criticism*, 21.

¹⁹ Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1986), xxiii.

distinguish Austrian academia from the Romantic and metaphysical philosophies that continued to exist in other German institutions.²⁰ Returning to empirical methods, musical study had to redefine its academic system. With government investment in the natural sciences, Hanslick was obliged to comply in order to procure his share of the academic resources. In his treatise *On the Musically Beautiful*, he attempts to incorporate empiricism and challenges his readers to embrace formalist analysis. However, as he continued to work as both critic and historian, Hanslick began to adjust his philosophy on music aesthetics.

Figure 2. Portrait of Eduard Hanslick²¹



While University of Vienna recreated its academic goals, Hanslick expanded on his initial ideas about empirical observation; he intended to include historical, cultural, and personal factors to understand music.²² Instead of taking on two separate roles, Hanslick synthesized his roles to become a critic-historian. He felt compelled to review performances and new works with

²⁰ Karnes, *Music, Criticism*, 11.

²¹ Fig. 2. *Eduard Hanslick*. 1865, in *Vienna's Golden Years of Music: 1850-1900*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950.

²² Karnes, *Music, Criticism*, 11.

the intent of documenting Vienna's musical culture for future reference. He now emphasized the structural foundations rather than formal structure in music; because beauty itself was relative, music was no longer beautiful for its inherent and absolute elements.²³ Operating under a Hegelian frame of reference, Hanslick turned away from the empiricist outline he set forth in *On the Musically Beautiful* and instead began writing volumes on Viennese musical life, *Vienna's Golden Years of Music*. He was convinced that his role as a music historian required him to record thoroughly the cultural history of Vienna and to critique the music itself. Playing two roles, Hanslick had the respect of his colleagues as well as the attention of the public. When he recommended Gustav Mahler for the position as the Hofoper's director, Vienna listened.

In May 1897, Mahler made his debut as a conductor at the Vienna Hofoper, and by October he had replaced Jahn as its the director. Though he was initially unaware of it, he had the support of the most influential musical personage in Vienna: Eduard Hanslick. As a rule critics meant little to Mahler, but he never forgot the wholehearted support that Wagner's rival gave—support that allowed him to ascend and retain the directorship of the Hofoper.²⁴ Though Mahler advocated a conflicting aesthetic, Hanslick found in him the future of modern music. On a more personal note, Hanslick advocated Mahler's appointment because he was a sworn enemy of Felix Mottl, another candidate for the position. On the consideration between Mottl and Mahler, Hanslick contended: "In my modest opinion, it might be a disaster if Mottl were to become director. It is known from his activity in Karlsruhe that he loves and conducts only the works of Wagner and his horrible German and French epigone. . . . To judge by what Mahler has accomplished in Prague and Hamburg, he on the contrary would give our opera new life without

²³ Karnes, *Music, Criticism*, 52.

²⁴ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, Vol. 1*, 393-94.

violating its classical tradition.”²⁵ As a major musical critic, Hanslick had kept a close watch on Mahler’s career abroad. In reference to Mahler’s ability to give opera new life, Hanslick turned to Mahler’s performances of Mozart, which he considered successful for the authenticity to the score and the text.²⁶

In 1877, when Mahler was a student at the Conservatory, he joined the Wagner Society, this professional connection would later lead to minor appointments for Mahler to conduct choirs in Vienna when he returned in 1897. Mahler himself reveled in his Hofoper appointment: “What gives me the greatest happiness is not the fact that I have secured a seemingly splendid post, but rather that at last I have found a home.”²⁷ He adds, rather ominously, “That is if the gods will only guide me! For I must be prepared for a terrible struggle.”²⁸

The struggle that Mahler foreshadowed did not make itself apparent when he first entered the Hofoper; instead, he was heralded with positive and hopeful reactions. In a review a month before Mahler’s first official Hofoper performance, the *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt* predicted: “In Gustav Mahler, a man of distinctive individuality moves, for the time being, into the orchestra. . . . Whatever role he eventually plays in the Viennese artistic institution, we can be sure that his engagement signifies a win for the theatre.”²⁹ Even before Wilhelm Jahn’s official resignation as director, the press began to proclaim that Mahler would revitalize the state of Viennese music.

²⁵ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 1*, 393-94.

²⁶ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 1*, 440-41.

²⁷ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 21.

²⁸ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 21.

²⁹ McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna*, 73.

Mahler the Outsider

Despite his successes performing and instituting new traditions for Viennese musical life, Mahler functioned as an outsider. Most obviously, Mahler's Jewishness made him an easy target for criticism. The daily periodical *Deutsche Zeitung* printed a dissenting opinion of Mahler's arrival in Vienna:

Mahler is a Jew. And so we ask, is it opportune openly to appoint a *Jew* to the German Opera of a city in which a strong movement against the fearsome *Jewification* of art is just cutting a path? . . . A Jewish conductor does not offer the least guarantee that our German-minded Court Opera, which sails in foreign waters anyway, will even continue in the German sense, in the preservation and cultivation of our great music.³⁰

The *Deutsche Zeitung* was a reactionary periodical with the intention of voicing the anti-Semitic, German nationalist agenda. The newspaper publicly denounced Mahler's baptism, thus refusing to accept Mahler's assimilation into the Viennese elite culture. Though it did not have the same clout as other periodicals such as *Die Neue Freie Presse*, the *Deutsche Zeitung*'s success as a periodical stemmed from a dangerous truth: by the late 19th century, anti-Semitism as a movement associated itself with German nationalism. Perhaps even more dangerous, the frequency of publication now made these opinions easily accessible to the public. K.M. Knittel suggests that the harsh anti-Semitism Mahler faced in Vienna motivated his departure.³¹ In her analysis of reception history, she found consistent anti-Semitic language from the press, especially regarding Mahler's reorchestrations of Beethoven symphonies. In general, critics received Mahler's reorchestrations with "invocations of nervousness, superficiality, and lack of understanding."³² Such claims attested to veiled anti-Semitism, and these reviews insist that

³⁰ McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna*, 101.

³¹ K.M. Knittel, "'Polemik in Concertsaal': Mahler, Beethoven, and the Viennese Critics," *19th Century Music* 29, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 317.

³² Knittel, "Polemik in Concertsaal," 309.

Mahler could not fully encapsulate the true, German Beethoven—his attempt would only appear superficially intellectual. In other words, the critics considered Mahler too Jewish.

Even free-thinkers were mindful of Mahler's Jewishness. Alma Schindler, later to become Alma Mahler, noted a brief encounter during their courtship that engendered a racial response. Writing in her memoirs about an early discussion between the young lovers about Jesus Christ, she admits, "Although I was brought up as a Catholic, the influence of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had made a free-thinker of me. Mahler contested my point of view with fervor. It was paradoxical that a Jew should hotly defend Christ against a Christian."³³ Mahler could not escape his identity. For someone who considered herself a "free-thinker," even Alma was inclined to comment on Mahler's Jewish background.

Despite his Jewishness, Mahler saw himself first and foremost as a German. Musicologist Carl Dahlhaus's essay on nationalism and music in the nineteenth century explores the sociopolitical effects of the era. Though he does not reference Mahler directly, Dahlhaus makes important claims regarding the intensifying nationalism in continental Europe. According to Dahlhaus, for the nineteenth century man "it was to his nation—and not to a creed, a dynasty, or a class—that a citizen owed the first duty in a clash of loyalties."³⁴ As evidenced by his conversion to Catholicism in order to secure the Vienna Hofoper position, Mahler rejected his Jewish identity and gave his loyalty to the German nation and its musical traditions.³⁵ He drew from his geographic influences, using "German and Slavic elements from Bohemia and Moravia, local Viennese materials as well as well-known German folk poetic and musical sources."³⁶ Like

³³ Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), 20.

³⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, Trans. by Mary Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 84.

³⁵ Knittel, "Polemik in Concertsaal," 317.

³⁶ Botstein, "Gustav Mahler's Vienna," 15.

his diverse background that influenced his identity, the nationalistic traits in his music drew from various cultures.

Mahler also regarded himself as an outsider in Vienna due to his Romantic tendencies. As evidenced by Hanslick's music aesthetic and philosophical movement, Vienna witnessed a restoration of Formalism. Mahler is set apart because of the "cult of genius" ideal prevalent in the Romantic era; the dogma of originality drove evolution of music in the search of novelty.³⁷ Though the cultural world around him evolved due to the Industrial Revolution, Mahler's musical world could remain "romantic in an unromantic age" because its "dissociation from the prevailing spirit of the age enabled it to fulfill a spiritual, cultural, and ideological function."³⁸ Mahler could succeed as a Romantic outsider because he had musical successes. In retrospect, Mahler's novelty as a composer rested in his synthesis of lieder and symphonic works, a logical historical evolution in the musical canon.

The Interconnection of Conducting and Composing

In Vienna, Mahler first established success as a dichotomy: he was simultaneously a traditional conductor and a progressive composer. Indicative of his own musical aesthetic, Hanslick wrote a glowing review of Mahler's conducting of Mozart:

Mahler's principal aim is to tune each piece to a dominating idea and preserve its character and style. This is clearest in the Mozart Symphony, which some people might have liked to hear performed with stronger accents and more glowing colours. . . . Seldom before have we heard this music performed with such clarity and transparency in the most delicate of textures and with such overwhelming overall grandeur and power.³⁹

³⁷ Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, 97-98.

³⁸ Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism*, 5.

³⁹ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 122-23.

Because of Hanslick's stature as a music critic, his views had an important influence, especially among the cultural elite. Hanslick's review highlights a specific element of Mahler's traditional approach to performing music of the greats: clarity in formal ideas. Mahler "tuned" the Mozart to a dominating idea of a Mozart symphony, its formal structure. Hanslick must have felt relieved to hear a performance of absolute music that stayed true to its essence; his review of Mahler attests to the belief in the inherent aesthetic qualities in symphonic works. Mahler's interpretation of Beethoven, which included new orchestrations, received high praise. He deliberately departed from tradition and refocused his attention on the composer's markings. Attributing his interpretative skills to his compositional craft, Mahler believed that his interpretation of Beethoven updated the orchestration clarify its formal aspects. He declares to his colleagues Bruno Walter and Siegfried Lipiner:

I've come to the conclusion that the markings in a score usually exceed the composer's intentions. . . . As for me, how sober and restrained my conducting has become compared to what it once was! When one sees the extent to which everything is exaggerated and deformed in one's own music, one begins to realize what others suffer. In fact, one is almost tempted not to give any indications of tempo, nuance, or expression but to let each interpreter express one's work in accordance with his own personal conception of it.⁴⁰

Mahler did not consider that markings in a score diminished the original intent; rather, the reorchestrations could fortify a formalist interpretation and addressed the balance of a larger, modern orchestra.

Even in opera, dependent on the extramusical elements of theatrics and drama, Mahler was recognized as a purist, commended for his "individual study" of opera scores. Approaching musical drama with the same intention as a symphonic work, Mahler could "remain original in his conception and stylistically feel his way into, and become familiar with, each work on the

⁴⁰ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 390.

strength of his own intuition.”⁴¹ Though he was a progressive-minded composer, Mahler stayed true to the musical tradition. He expressed the music from the “Great Germans” with an interpretation that closely resembled Mozart’s and Beethoven’s composition ideas, rather than a Romantic, perhaps more bombastic interpretation. In a review for the *Wiener Abendpost*, Robert Hirschfeld praised Mahler’s ability “to free the melodic line from the heaviness of material sound so that it rises from the orchestra like perfume from flowers. . . . He keys everything to Mozart’s fortes and pianos in an interpretation which has its own dynamics, its own colour.”⁴² Mahler’s intellectual understanding of music aligned with the philosophical movements in the humanities relevant to Vienna; he took a more formal approach to music and stayed true to the composer’s intentions. His rational approach to performing and understanding music would have influence on his own composition techniques.

Current scholars now see Mahler as the crux between Romanticism and Modernism, as the point in history where lieder and symphony merged. Guido Adler, a close professional colleague, also identified Mahler’s musical advancement. In an essay published after Mahler’s death, Adler praises Mahler’s compositional ideal:

Just as (at the time of his activity in Vienna) his intellect penetrated into the works of Kant, his heart kept its naïve belief in fairy-tales and in a visionary fairy-tale bliss, and he saw with a transfigured artist’s view into the heaven that opened itself to him. With the childlike spirit of the folk song he was able to raise himself to that point where only imagination and faith, not reason, escort one. A deep longing—for the infinite—runs through almost all of his works, and the finite does not disrupt the seer’s view.⁴³

⁴¹ Guido Adler, “Gustav Mahler.” In *Gustav Mahler and Guido Adler: Records of a Friendship*, ed. by Edward R. Reilly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 20. This study of Gustav Mahler was originally published in 1914, three years after Mahler’s death. Adler calls the essay a “result of long preliminary studies and of experiences and observations” from his personal connection with Mahler.

⁴² La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 47.

⁴³ Adler, “Gustav Mahler,” 40.

Adler's words speak to Mahler's deep understanding of music, as evidenced by his interpretations and performances, and it connects Mahler's intellect to the metaphysical creative force. It is not incorrect to regard Mahler as a Romantic; he exemplified traits of Romanticism typical of the earlier nineteenth century in his compositions: a hearkening back to simpler times, a fascination with the unknown, and a susceptibility to emotion. According to Adler, however, Mahler was more than a Romantic, and he did not consider Mahler a "programmatic composer."⁴⁴ The integration of the formalism in the symphony and the simplicity of the folk melody created a musical medium in which Mahler could operate. His music appealed to the Romantic qualities still prevalent in the general musical taste, but his music also interested the intellectual elite. In a city where cultural status divided musical taste, Mahler could succeed in Vienna.

⁴⁴ Adler, "Gustav Mahler," 40.

Mahler in America, 1907-1911

Mahler Leaves Vienna

In 1898, after a year at the Hofoper, Mahler received an offer to work in New York City. Understandably, having recently ascended to a prominent position as director of the Hofoper and the Vienna Philharmonic, he declined the first American invitation. However, Mahler's relationship with the Hofoper slowly eroded, and invitations from America became a viable option. Nearly ten years later, the *Neues Wiener Journal* made an announcement about Mahler's departure, and the periodical largely blamed the Hofoper: "The reasons which have caused the Director of the Court Opera to take this decision are obvious. The conditions at the theatre have made an artistic crisis inevitable, which Herr Mahler no longer feels capable of overcoming."⁴⁵ Mahler himself cited his departure as a means to gain "complete independence."⁴⁶ Because of his strong belief in his own artistic integrity, he demanded much from his musicians and had grown tired of facing opposition within his own ensemble. Many of Mahler's colleagues in Vienna campaigned against Mahler's exit; they applauded him for his ideal, and they dismissed the hostile newspaper critics as a voice separate from the general population. As anti-Semitism sentiments grew in Vienna, the sociopolitical prejudices that Mahler faced may be the underlying reason for his departure. Though he converted to Catholicism to secure his position in Vienna, he was not willing to sacrifice his individuality to appease a growing opposition.⁴⁷ Away from the public sphere, Mahler's personal health was declining. He could not keep up with the responsibilities as director, and the offer from New York City provided Mahler a conducting position without the administrative duties.

⁴⁵ *Neues Wiener Journal*, 23 May 1907, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 201.

⁴⁶ *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, 5 June 1907, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 201.

⁴⁷ La Grange. *Gustav Mahler*, Vol. 4, 483.

By the end of June 1907, nearly ten years into his directorship of the Hofoper, Mahler accepted an engagement to conduct in New York City. According to Mahler's biographer, Henry-Louis La Grange, Europeans perceived America as "a continent where money was omnipotent, enterprise untrammelled, and advertising deafening. Beyond that, it was a place where virtuosos hogged the limelight."⁴⁸ Throughout Mahler's career, he ensured that above all else limelight-driven virtuosos deferred to the music and to the conductor—usually, himself. Advocating an adroit musical ideal, Mahler found success in Vienna for his intellect and work ethic. Even Americans had their doubts as to why Mahler would want to leave for the new world, where he would be subjected to the private interests of many operating bodies instead of having absolute control of his work. Many of the newspapers prior to his arrival raised questions—and some rumors. Primarily, they wondered whether Mahler would replace Heinrich Conried, the current impresario of the Metropolitan Opera House. To dispel any such rumors, Mahler reported, "I don't have any plans—for everything always turns out differently. . . . I am a conductor, happy to be free from the worries besetting a director! My entire program as a conductor can be summed up in one sentence: *I will do my best.*"⁴⁹ Mahler's tenure in New York City would prove very fruitful; his salary was considerably higher in New York than in Vienna, and his New York duties left him ample time in between concert seasons to compose.⁵⁰

La Grange claims that America "was the rather unsophisticated society in which Mahler was going to assert his conceptions of the musically beautiful."⁵¹ With a reverence for Wagner and a respect for Hanslick, Mahler would bring both sides of the German Romantic debate with him to America. Balancing a career as interpreter and creator, Mahler came to embody elements

⁴⁸ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 1.

⁴⁹ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 41.

⁵⁰ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 103.

⁵¹ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 557.

of both absolute music and programmatic music. Though he achieved a musical balance in Vienna, New York City was still in the throes of Wagnerism. The musical culture, fostered by the critics in the daily newspapers, had little interest in or sympathy for Hanslick's views. With new concert programs, Mahler often challenged the established musical ideals in New York City.

Mahler Comes to America

Turn-of-the -century America enjoyed the advantages of the “Gilded Age,” when the nouveaux-riches of the steel and railroad industries became the powerhouses of culture. America had not yet established its own cultural elite and so adopted European values. Thus, opera houses and symphonic societies became an American social outlet and a means to display social status. Rejected from buying opera boxes by the long-established Academy of Music, the families of new wealth built the Metropolitan Opera House in 1883, which not only boasted three tiers of boxes to satisfy the underlying motive of displaying new wealth, but also seated nearly 4,000, thus becoming a more democratic musical institution than the Academy of Music—a bastion for “old money” individuals.⁵² (See Figure 3 for photograph). Soon after the Met's inception, Oscar Hammerstein built his own musical institution, the Manhattan Opera, to rival the nouveaux-riches and make accessible the musical culture of the status-wielding elite.⁵³ With Hammerstein's establishment detracting from ticket sales, Heinrich Conried, the Met's impresario, was forced to recognize the importance of the quality of the conductor. Therefore, Mahler's engagement can be attributed to the competition between Conried at the Met and Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera Company.⁵⁴ More notably, the rapid progress of these musical institutions sought European influence to create “high culture” in America. Essentially,

⁵² La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 6-8.

⁵³ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 200.

⁵⁴ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 30.

Europeans were hired out to preside over the musical production while Americans managed the business. Together they created the music business in which Mahler found himself in the early 20th century.

Figure 3. Photograph of the Metropolitan Opera House c. 1894⁵⁵



According to Mark N. Grant, music criticism grew in popularity with the increase of investment in the arts because the “larger but less monied public” wanted “to soak it all in, to ‘get Culture.’”⁵⁶ In general, the New York critics operated under a Wagnerian slant—most had learned music through the late-Romantic school of thought—in the absence of Hanslickian views, critics acclaimed passionate, emotional musical performances and often disregarded formal analysis. The close reading of critical reviews will concentrate on those from Henry E. Krehbiel of the *New York Times* and Henry T. Finck of the *Evening Post* because they were among the most prolific writers both in criticism and scholarly works on music. Also, Krehbiel

⁵⁵ Fig. 3. *Metropolitan Opera House*. 1894, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991. Plate 24.

⁵⁶ Mark N. Grant, *Maestros of the Pen*, ed. Eric Friedheim (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 59.

was one of the most pugnacious critics of the time. Because of its progressive outlook on the musical world, reviews from the trade magazine *The Musical Courier* will contrast the critics of the daily press. The reviews published in these periodicals represent in part Mahler's reception and give an idea of the developing American aesthetic.

The New York Critics

Of the critics in turn-of-the-century New York City, Henry Krehbiel of the *New York Tribune* stood out as "The Dean," and he determined the opinion of the musical community—or so he thought. Starting as a general reporter at the *Cincinnati Gazette*, Krehbiel was largely self-taught in music and had a forty-year long career as musical critic at the *New York Tribune*.⁵⁷

Henry T. Finck, a fellow music critic, wrote of Krehbiel:

He was the Dean of the Critical Faculty, having started his career in New York a year before Henderson and me. He was naturally patriarchal and pontifical; the younger critics took refuge under his protecting wings like little chicks and with their aid he wielded a wide influence.⁵⁸

A Wagnerite through-and-through, Krehbiel championed his idol and any musician who fell under Wagner's influence. He quickly befriended the conductor Anton Seidl, Wagner's so-called American prophet, and continued to hold him as the standard in America.⁵⁹ Outside of his daily musical reviews for the *Tribune*, Krehbiel held the position of program annotator for the New York Philharmonic Society. In a vein similar to Hanslick's, he wrote his own version of an aesthetic treatise entitled *How to Listen to Music* in which he discussed formal elements of music, types of concerts (e.g., symphonic concerts, piano recitals, operas, and choral concerts), and—naturally—the role of the critic.

⁵⁷ *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, Eds., Nicolas Slonimsky, Laura Diane Kuhn, and Dennis McIntire, Centennial ed. (London: Schirmer Books, 1997), s.v. "Krehbiel, Henry E."

⁵⁸ Henry T. Finck, *My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1926), 409.

⁵⁹ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 10.

A close colleague of Krehbiel's and often holding opposite convictions, Henry T. Finck wrote for *The Nation* and the *Evening Post*. Like Krehbiel, Finck was not initially educated in music; rather, he graduated with highest honors from Harvard University in philosophy.⁶⁰ Like Krehbiel, he was a self-taught Wagnerite. In his autobiography, *My Adventures in the Golden Age of Music*, Finck retells the story of graduating from Harvard and turning down work in order to review the first Bayreuth Festival held in 1876.⁶¹ An ambitious young man, he approached Wagner in order to gain access to private rehearsals for which Wagner personally made two exceptions: Liszt and Finck himself. After publishing his review of the Bayreuth Festival, Finck received scholarships to pursue his musical studies in Berlin, Heidelberg, and Vienna. He returned to New York City for a career in musical criticism, shortly after Krehbiel's own move. According to Finck, "It was for Wagner and Liszt that I did the most ardent and persistent missionary work during my forty-three years in New York."⁶² Generally softer-edged than his fellow critics, Finck wrote of his favorite profession:

Many critics love to dwell on flaws in the work of the great and the greatest. I heard those flaws but ignored them, dwelling instead on the things that raised these artists above the level of dull mediocrity on which most musicians and other mortals dwell. . . . In looking back on my long career as a musical critic nothing strikes me as so strange as that I should have been so often called upon to act as champion and defender of the greatest musicians against some of my colleagues.⁶³

In fact, Finck was one of Mahler's consistent defenders and noted in his autobiography Mahler's gratitude because his "sympathy and support have been among the few experiences that have made New York worth while."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Margery Morgan Lowens, "Finck, Henry T.," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deanne Root <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> (Accessed 7 February 2015).

⁶¹ Finck, *My Adventures*, 122-123.

⁶² Finck, *My Adventures*, 124.

⁶³ Grant, *Maestros*, 100.

⁶⁴ Finck, *My Adventures*, 424.

Unlike the daily papers, the *Musical Courier* was a major trade publication based in New York that covered both national and international musical events. Joining the staff in 1902, Leonard Liebbling wrote prolifically for the *Musical Courier* and succeeded Marc A. Blumenberg as editor-in-chief in 1911. In his autobiography, Finck wrote of Liebbling: “Belonging to an all-round musical family he *knew* what he was writing about and everybody read—and reads—him; his inexhaustible supply of jests reminds one of Mark Twain.”⁶⁵ Of his predecessor, Blumenberg, La Grange noted his “permanent feud with the music critics of the daily newspapers, whom he ceaselessly attacked in his editorials.”⁶⁶ Indeed, the gentlemen at the *Musical Courier* had sharp tongues and a keen sense of erudition. With articles from the major musical cities in Europe and America—from news at the large opera houses to local recital announcements—the *Musical Courier* had a more global outlook than the *New York Tribune* and the *Evening Post*. Its large scope gave the journal a more progressive, holistic perspective on the state of music. For a favorite recurring segment, the *Musical Courier* published different New York City reviews in parallel so as to highlight disparate opinions held by the major music critics. The “anonymous” editors at the *Musical Courier* held themselves to a high standard by avoiding the rumor-mucking tactics of the daily press. With a focus on musical announcements, criticism, and analysis, the *Musical Courier* provided its subscribers a refined discussion of the musical world. Covering stories about Mahler long before he came to America, the *Musical Courier* deemed him a guiding force for the state of American music.

Mahler and the Metropolitan Opera House

When Mahler stepped foot in New York City, he arrived as the harbinger of Wagnerian opera. The large population of German immigrants brought with them the desire for German

⁶⁵ Finck, *My Adventures*, 404.

⁶⁶ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 68.

music; thus, for his first encounter with an American audience, Mahler conducted *Tristan und Isolde* at the Metropolitan Opera House. New Yorkers had enjoyed *Tristan* for over twenty years at the Met, and Mahler moved both audiences and critics with his reinvigorating performance of the well-known opera. Krehbiel in the *Tribune* praised Mahler's American debut: "Mr. Mahler did honor to himself, Wagner's music and the New York public. It was a strikingly vital reading which he gave to Wagner's familiar score; . . . eloquent in phrasing, rich in color, elastic in movement and always sympathetic with the singers."⁶⁷ Finck at the *Post* deemed Mahler's performance simply "enchanted."⁶⁸ Krehbiel and Finck discovered a renewed sense of beauty when listening to Mahler conduct Wagner's works, their florid language indicative of Mahler's artistry. In a backhanded way, the *Musical Courier* began its review with an admonishment of the press for their tedious reviews. Claiming responsibility for teaching the critics "what they know of Wagner," the *Musical Courier* expressed their discontent with "the caliber of its pupils."⁶⁹ After comparing different reviews on *Tristan*, the writer of this particular review—most likely Liebling at the time—regarded Mahler's conducting "a tremendous achievement, and revealed the score in absolutely new aspects, intellectual, poetical and musical."⁷⁰ The *Courier's* review attacked the daily press because of the tendency to measure Mahler against Anton Seidl or scrutinize minutiae—in addition to enjoying the performance as a whole, Krehbiel criticized specific tempo changes that would have gone unnoticed among the general public. Embracing every refreshing detail of Mahler's conducting, the *Courier's* review stands as evidence of its progressive stance.

⁶⁷ Henry E. Krehbiel, "Music," *New York Tribune*, January 2, 1908, 7.

⁶⁸ Henry T. Finck, "Music," *Evening Post*, January 2, 1908, 7.

⁶⁹ *Musical Courier*, January 2, 1908, 21.

⁷⁰ *Musical Courier*, January 2, 1908, 22.

In addition to his Wagner performances, Mahler excited American audiences with his interpretations of operas by Mozart, Beethoven, Smetana, and Tchaikovsky. He dazzled critics with his premiere of his first non-Wagnerian opera, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, in January 1908. Finck, at the *Evening Post*, praised Mahler for "an enlivening and inspired performance."⁷¹ A year later, his next Mozart premiere, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, garnered a near perfect review from the Dean himself: "All the vivacious music foamed and sparkled and flashed like champagne. This was the result of the new life brought into the establishment by the German conductor."⁷² In his review, Krehbiel noted the lackluster performances prior to Mahler's arrival; the Met had performed *Le Nozze di Figaro* only three times in the previous five years. In essence, the critics were especially pleased because Mahler rejuvenated Mozart's previously dormant works:

Mr. Mahler must have had that expression in mind when editing and staging this opera, and used all his skill in restoring the significance of the comedy, without detriment to the music; and in this he has succeeded admirably. His 'Figaro' is one of the most brilliant achievements to be placed to the credit of the Metropolitan in the quarter-century of its existence.⁷³

Praise of the Mozart performances attest to Mahler's formalist background. Instead of performing a Mozart opera like a Wagner opera, with grandiose musical gestures and stage-demanding singers, Mahler performed Mozart operas as they were intended: The ensemble received their comic and dramatic clues from Mozart's music, which had a lighter and wittier dramatic presence than the music of Wagner.

Mahler's non-Mozart, non-Wagnerian repertoire included Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*), and Tchaikovsky's *La Pique Dame* (*The Queen of Spades*)—all seen through a Wagnerian lens. In his generally positive review of Mahler's *Fidelio* performance, Krehbiel found "Mahler's dramatic nuances reflect that of a

⁷¹ *Evening Post*, January 24, 1908, 5.

⁷² *New York Tribune*, January 14, 1909, 7.

⁷³ *Evening Post*, January 14, 1909, 9.

‘Nibelung’ play.”⁷⁴ Considering the performance a success, Finck also took account of the “conversion of Fidelio into a sort of Wagnerian music-drama.”⁷⁵ Later, of *The Bartered Bride*, Krehbiel called to attention “the kind of Wagnerism which may be found also in Verdi’s ‘Falstaff’ which, despite its modernity, also consorts amicably with ‘Le Nozze di Figaro.’”⁷⁶ Despite performing non-Wagnerian operas, Mahler’s productions still struck a Wagnerian chord in the critics. The overbearing shadow left by Wagner could explain the critics’ treatment of these unfamiliar works. The critics also praised Mahler for fully embodied the ideals of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, successfully unifying drama and music. Regardless, Mahler left his critics and audiences an impressive run of opera performances that ended with Tchaikovsky’s *The Queen of Spades*. Regarding Mahler’s conducting of the opera, Finck declared: “The production adds one more to the many laurels he has won in this city.”⁷⁷

Mahler’s Philharmonic Concerts

While he conducted at the Metropolitan Opera, Mahler enjoyed high praise for his opera productions; however, he could not keep a consensus among the critics over his Philharmonic Society concerts. When he arrived in New York City, the Philharmonic was not a permanent orchestra. In 1909, Mary Sheldon, the head of the Ladies’ Committee in charge of the Philharmonic, and Walter Damrosch, the current conductor for the orchestra, decided to make their orchestra a permanent institution to rival the established orchestras in Chicago and Boston.⁷⁸ Changes to the Philharmonic Society included an expansion of the concert season and

⁷⁴ *New York Tribune*, March 21, 1908, 7.

⁷⁵ *Evening Post*, March 21, 1908, 2.

⁷⁶ *New York Tribune*, February 20, 1909, 7.

⁷⁷ *Evening Post*, March 7, 1910, 9.

⁷⁸ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 365.

the hiring of the renowned conductor, Gustav Mahler.⁷⁹ Intent on impacting the musical culture, Mahler accepted this new position despite the demands and the inevitable effect on his health.⁸⁰

In a letter to Anna Moll, Mahler wrote:

I am now aiming, or rather ‘they’ are now aiming, at forming a Mahler Orchestra for me entirely for my own purposes, which will not only earn me a lot of money but will also give me a bit of satisfaction. It now depends entirely on how the New Yorkers react to my works. Since they are completely unbiased, I am hoping to find here a fertile soil for my compositions and consequently a spiritual home, which I could never achieve in Europe despite all the sensations.⁸¹

With a new orchestra, Mahler brought his musical ideal to New York City, and he considered the New York audience a blank slate. (See Figure 4 for an example of a New York Philharmonic program.) Though he still considered Europe home, his bitterness is evident in the letter: He could not achieve satisfaction because of the European biases, and so he hoped for a better reception of his own compositions in the new world.

The critical reaction to Mahler during his tenure with the Philharmonic Society must be contextualized in how New York music critics discussed absolute and program music. In Krehbiel’s *How to Listen to Music*, he outlines absolute music as a “very noble artistic composition, be it of tones or forms or colors or thoughts expressed in words,” and he adds that music “is that high ideal of goodness, truthfulness, and beauty.”⁸² He defines program music as “instrumental compositions which make a frank effort to depict scenes, incidents, or emotional processes to which the composer himself gives the clew either by means of a descriptive title or a verbal motto.”⁸³ Krehbiel’s distinction between absolute music and program music parallels Hanslick’s ideas as set in *On the Musically Beautiful*, specifically in the understanding of tones

⁷⁹ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 367.

⁸⁰ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 368.

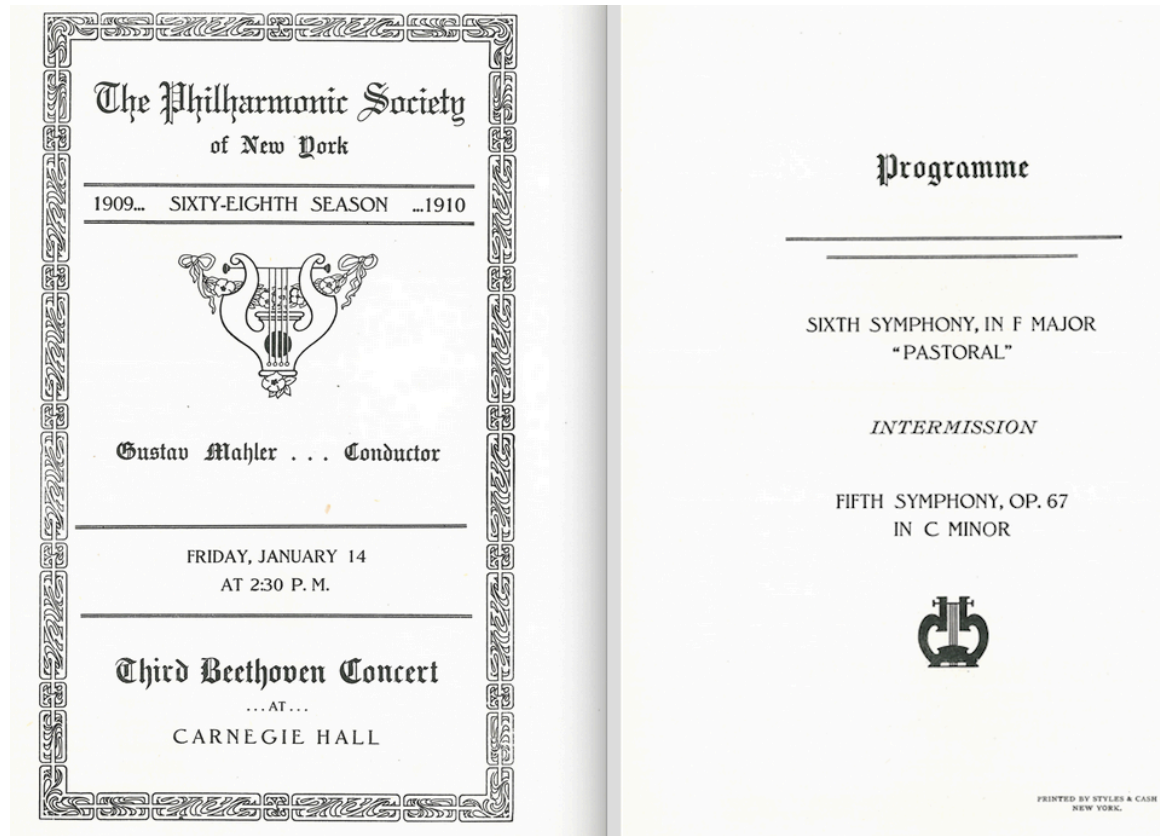
⁸¹ Gustav Mahler in a letter to Anna Moll, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 215.

⁸² Henry T. Krehbiel, *How to Listen to Music* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1896), 44.

⁸³ Krehbiel, *How to Listen to Music*, 48.

and forms as the highest musical ideal. Hanslick would be proud to know that his American counterparts, specifically Krehbiel, did have a strong affinity for absolute music. To his colleagues, Krehbiel championed two German powerhouses: Wagner and Beethoven. In Beethoven, he found poetic beauty and beauty of form.

Figure 4. An example of a program from the New York Philharmonic⁸⁴



A close reading of the New York critics reveals at least two levels of discourse on Mahler’s performances of absolute music: beauty and structure. In the “beauty category,” reviews cover the poetry, melody, and aesthetic virtue. Writing for the daily press, Krehbiel and Finck favored language that discussed beauty in the work and avoided less formal terms. In this manner, they appealed to their average readers and drew them into the concert halls. After a

⁸⁴ Figure 4. The Philharmonic Society of New York Programme Notes. January 14, 1910. New York Philharmonic, New York City. www.archives.nyphil.org.

November 25, 1909, performance of Brahms, Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Finck wrote, “Mr. Mahler and his players brought out all the beauty there is in it, and emphasized significant details that had previously escaped attention.”⁸⁵ He later noted that Mahler played the melodious second and third movements “*con amore*.”⁸⁶ Krehbiel in his review simply remarked, “Nothing finer than the finale of the Brahms third symphony under Mr. Mahler’s direction had been heard in our concert rooms for years.”⁸⁷

Of the same Brahms performance, the *Musical Courier* praised Mahler’s intellectual analysis of the work—its form and structure.

Under Mahler’s direction Brahms is microscopically dissected and we heard, for the first time, the inner parts, and thus the structure of the work begins to be understood. With the ability to interpret, Mahler presents the poetry, the musical manner and the character of the composition; its outlines, its treatment of form and its substance are explained in the delivery. In short, we hear a symphony. . . . There can be no converts to the Brahms cult when his symphonies are performed without the intellectual analysis and without any idiomatic sense.⁸⁸

The focus on the structure of the work with Mahler’s attentive direction highlights Brahms’s use of the symphonic form. Essentially, Mahler used his experience as a composer, thinking analytically and understanding the structural components of Brahms’s symphony. The *Musical Courier* appreciated Mahler’s ability to interpret the formal elements of the symphony and make it clear to the audience. In other reviews, the *Musical Courier* drew attention to “the contrapuntal clarity, beauty of form, loveliness of melody, and the inimitable grace and charm.”⁸⁹ The *Musical Courier* had a specific focus on formal elements because, as a trade magazine, it catered to musicians, whereas the daily press papers—the *New York Tribune*, *Evening Post*, etc.—concentrated on simple, aesthetic beauty to cater to their own audience.

⁸⁵ *Evening Post*, November 26, 1909, 7.

⁸⁶ *Evening Post*, January 27, 1910, 9.

⁸⁷ *New York Tribune*, November 26, 1909, 7.

⁸⁸ *Musical Courier*, December 1, 1909, 21.

⁸⁹ *Musical Courier*, December 15, 1909, 50.

Despite their semantic differences, the manner in which the three papers react to absolute music underlines a fundamental aesthetic: clarity. Krehbiel and Finck considered Mahler's interpretation "emphasized significant details that had previously escaped attention," while the reviewer at the *Musical Courier* commented on the "contrapuntal clarity" and "beauty of form." In other words, Americans like clarity; they like it when previously muddled things are made clear for them—for example, when Mahler emphasized new details in the Brahms symphony that enlivened the piece. They understood form and poetry in that form highlights the poetry and the poetry heightens the form. With Mahler's clear interpretations, Americans found dramatic beauty in formal music.

Related to the idea of musical clarity, critics' negative reviews address two categories: coherence and artistic ethics. In January 1911, Mahler had the privilege of presenting his Symphony No. 4 in G Major to the American public, but the reviewer at *Musical Courier* complained, "Mahler's fourth symphony . . . gained nothing in coherence of meaning, definiteness of expression, or distinctiveness of melody and orchestral characterization."⁹⁰ Additionally, Mahler did not adhere to traditional performance practice. Krehbiel faulted Mahler for his interpretations of classical works—specifically Beethoven. For a December 12, 1909, performance of Beethoven, Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Krehbiel argued that Mahler's interpretation "raised questions of artistic ethics as well as taste" and he complained that "none of Mr. Mahler's amendments of the classic text seemed to accomplish enough to justify the liberties which he took."⁹¹ A staunch Beethoven defender, Krehbiel took it upon himself to criticize Mahler's modernization of and addenda to the Beethoven classics. In his autobiography, Finck noted an odd disconnect between Krehbiel's distaste for Mahler's interpretations and his

⁹⁰ *Musical Courier*, January 25, 1911, 19.

⁹¹ *New York Tribune*, December 13, 1909, 7.

unofficial role as the “the American high priest of Beethoven.”⁹² Negative reviews regarding Mahler’s conducting of absolute works discussed his lack of integrity in regards to the score. Krehbiel and his American followers disliked musical performances that sacrificed tradition for the sake of entertainment.

Mahler’s baton reinvigorated absolute music because of his more intellectual analysis, but his specialty was conducting programmatic music. Positive reviews of program music focused on emotion and picturesqueness. With a focus on the emotional reaction to program music, critics also highlighted elements of imagination, passion, and virility in Mahler’s conducting. After Mahler performed Liszt’s *Mazeppa*, a symphonic poem, Finck exclaimed: “There was something simply electrifying in the rhythmic energy which Mr. Mahler imparted to his players in this inspired piece, in which realism, melody, harmonic novelty, and orchestral grandeur are united in a way to stir one’s every nerve and make the heart beat in sympathy.”⁹³ After Mahler conducted his own *Kindertotenlieder*, Krehbiel wrote a favorable review regarding Mahler’s ability to “stir up the imagination and the emotions.”⁹⁴ In addition to the emotional elements, Mahler was expert in accentuating the extramusical elements in programmatic works. After a February 13, 1910, performance of an all-Wagner concert program, the *New York Tribune*, *Evening Post*, and *Musical Courier* were of the same opinion: Mahler truly embodied Wagner. For Krehbiel, the set of Wagner songs were “vividly read, with fine elasticity of melodic contour, a broad sweep, much warmth of color and poetical distribution of nuances.”⁹⁵ Finck valued Mahler for arousing “much enthusiasm” in the audience with his virile readings.⁹⁶ Also enthralled by the performance, the *Musical Courier* credited the Philharmonic musicians

⁹² Finck, *My Adventures*, 425.

⁹³ *Evening Post*, November 5, 1909, 7.

⁹⁴ *New York Tribune*, January 27, 1910, 7.

⁹⁵ *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1910, 7.

⁹⁶ *Evening Post*, February 14, 1910, 9.

who “revealed all their poetry, passion and ‘program’ picturesqueness in the vital and richly nuanced readings given by Mahler.”⁹⁷ Considering their positive reaction to Mahler’s picturesque readings, the critics appreciated when the extramusical elements were made clear for them—similar to their appreciation for formal clarity in absolute music.

Musical meaning is often lost in translation, even in programmatic music. In negative reviews of program music, critics often used words of failure: “lost,” “fell flat,” and quite simply “failed.” After a performance of Tchaikovsky’s “Pathétique” Symphony, Finck argued Mahler “did his very worst, a worst of which his admirers did not believe him to be capable.”⁹⁸ He called the performance “perfunctory,” putting most of the blame on Mahler’s slow tempo that detracted from the music’s poignancy.⁹⁹ Krehbiel and Finck had the clearest negative reaction toward Mahler’s own definition of program music—simply because Mahler refused to publish a program. For a performance of his own Symphony No. 1 in D Major, Mahler refused to include program notes for the concertgoers. In spite of Mahler’s intentions, Krehbiel published the concert program as a supplement to his *New York Tribune* review:

In deference to the wish of Mr. Mahler, the annotator of the Philharmonic Society’s programmes refrains from even an outline analysis of the symphony . . . All interest and attention should be concentrated on the music itself. ‘At a concert,’ he says, ‘one should listen, not look—use the ears, not the eyes.’ . . . As to the exposition of the probable, possible, or likely poetical contents of the music . . . he thinks, should be left wholly to the imagination of each individual. All writings about music, even those of musicians themselves, he holds to be injurious to musical enjoyment.¹⁰⁰

Drawing from his formalist background, Mahler insists that the audience has the capability to understand the musical elements of work, and he despises the program note’s function for guided listening. Krehbiel’s contention with Mahler highlights the difference between the two men’s

⁹⁷ *Musical Courier*, February 16, 1910, 49.

⁹⁸ *Evening Post*, January 21, 1910, 9.

⁹⁹ *Evening Post*, January 21, 1910, 9.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1909, 7.

understanding of music, but it also highlights a miscommunication about Krehbiel's role as program annotator for the Philharmonic. Krehbiel prided himself in his work, and perhaps he took it too personally that Mahler did not need his services for the concert. Perhaps, Mahler wanted the New York audience to have an unbiased first listen to his symphony, whereas Krehbiel wanted to educate the audience before exposing them to a newer work. Finck also argued for the requirement of a program:

It is possible that Mr. Mahler took this attitude because of a revulsion against the excesses of modern programme music; but his position is equally extreme and untenable. . . . A known programme helps the hearer, as it helped to fertilize the composer's genius; and it also helps the conductor to get the correct conception of the piece.¹⁰¹

Taking a different stance, Finck's review implies that the conductor should use the program notes to make specific decisions about the performance—essentially, program notes create clarity for both performer and audience. The critics' reaction to Mahler's rejection of program notes underlines the inherent need for guided interpretation in a programmatic work. The program note adds to the overall understanding of a piece, and it helps to clarify extramusical elements. The negative reception of program music conversely parallels the positive reception of program music: Critics appreciate imaginative forces and colorful interpretations, but they disparage performances that remain ambiguous.

Mahler's Impact on New York

New York critics of Mahler's performances focus on a key aesthetic issue: transparency. At the end of the day, American audiences need clarity in their music. They like when the form is clear; they like when the extramusical elements are clear. These set musical aesthetics determined Mahler's successes and failures. With his popularity riding on programmatic music,

¹⁰¹ *Evening Post*, December 18 1909, 4.

the critics recognized Mahler as a conductor of Wagner, Liszt, and Berlioz. The *Musical Courier* hailed Mahler's "stirring performances of Strauss, Berlioz, and Liszt," and claimed, "Mahler has proved that he understands and interprets 'program' music quite as successfully as he does the most staid symphonies of the ultra serious masters."¹⁰² Finck at the *Evening Post* claimed, "It is really beginning to look as though Philharmonic audiences will consider themselves grievously ill treated unless Mr. Mahler places at least one Wagner number on every programme. And it is to be hoped that the audiences will have their way in the matter."¹⁰³ In his conducting tenure in America, Mahler made an impact on his musical audiences when he engaged in their Wagner craze. For the American musical aesthetic, it was still relevant to define Mahler's success by his late Romantic traits. "Above all, his readings are emotional," Finck declared, "and that is why he succeeds in making his audiences enjoy everything he produces, be it of the eighteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century."¹⁰⁴

Mahler understood that America's musical tastes had origins in the Romantic era and the New German School. Certain trends become apparent after analyzing the Philharmonic concerts performed in New York under Mahler's direction. Most obviously, Mahler leaned toward two main composers: Wagner and Beethoven. Of the fifty-nine concerts with the Philharmonic, twenty-four concerts included Wagner and/or Beethoven—in comparison, only six performances featured Brahms's work. During his tenure with the Philharmonic, Mahler commonly programmed concerts dedicated solely to Beethoven or Wagner. Nevertheless, he took it upon himself to program earlier, lesser-known works that would stimulate his audience intellectually. In his first full season (1909-1910), he programmed a Historical Series. At first it featured truly historical composers—J. S. Bach, Rameau, Grétry—but in a matter of two concerts the series

¹⁰² *Musical Courier*, January 26, 1910, 37.

¹⁰³ *Evening Post*, February 6, 1911, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Evening Post*, December 13, 1909, 9.

turned toward composers of the Romantic era. The Historical Series culminated in a concert featuring Pfitzner, Bruckner, and Strauss: the epitome of late Romantic music. Mahler entrusted the Schirmer publishing company with his Bach Suite arranged for the Philharmonic Orchestra. The suite consisted of movements from the B minor and the D major Orchestral Suites, and he intended to make the suites as appealing as possible to an audience unfamiliar with Baroque music.¹⁰⁵

The following season was cut short by his illness and death, but in twenty-three performances in the 1910-1911 season Mahler continued to impress the New York audiences by challenging their taste. He more frequently programmed Smetana, Dvořák, and Tchaikovsky than he did in prior seasons. In a similar vein to his Historical Series, Mahler planned an unofficial series focusing on national music. He programmed a French concert featuring Enesco, Lalo, Massenet, Debussy, Bizet, and Chabrier. After the French concert and for the following concerts, he programmed German Romantics: Wagner, Beethoven, Strauss, and Liszt. Toward the end of his career, he programmed an English-American concert. La Grange insists, “Mahler almost certainly had to grit his teeth when it came to compiling an entire programme of English and American music, for this repertoire, with the exception of one work by Elgar, was unknown territory to him.”¹⁰⁶ The critics were fairly pleased with the performance, but they had their individual qualms about the compositions. Again, the nationalistic concerts did not accommodate the American taste; rather, the concerts sought to broaden the American musical horizon. Mahler’s penultimate concert, before his untimely illness, featured Beethoven, Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Weber’s Oberon overture, Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto in E Minor, and Liszt’s symphonic poem, *Lamartine*. The concert program featured a fairly balanced mix of absolute

¹⁰⁵ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 1532.

¹⁰⁶ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 1141.

music and program music—indicative of Mahler’s own artistic influences. His motivation to educate American audiences on his opinion of “good music” positions him as a pseudo-Hanslick: Mahler and Hanslick are both harbingers of beautiful music.

Though playing opposite roles on the musical stage, the composer and the critic, Mahler and Hanslick had their own ideas of the musically beautiful and felt compelled to share their opinions with the masses. Hanslick’s presence in America was achieved through Mahler’s term in America. In his own review of Mahler’s conducting in Vienna, Hanslick highlighted the “clarity and transparency in the most delicate of textures.”¹⁰⁷ Echoing Hanslick in a review published months before his tenure in New York, the *Musical Courier* praised Mahler for his union of melody and form, noting the “logical theme development,” “melody,” and “complex harmonization.”¹⁰⁸ Before he arrived in America, Mahler already had Hanslickian traits to accompany his Wagnerian tendencies.

A celebrity because of his European status, Mahler felt an outsider in America: he combined the musical beliefs of Wagner with the intellectual realizations of Hanslick. At times, he himself did not appeal directly to the American aesthetic. From one viewpoint, Hanslick admired Mahler because he felt like an outsider—a Jewish music critic will have enemies (namely Wagner). Mahler, too, was an outsider in Vienna, a city with culture molded by Hanslick—yet both men prospered in their respective cities of employment. They felt comfortable in a realm apart, free to explore their musical ambitions to understand and create the musically beautiful.

¹⁰⁷ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 2*, 123.

¹⁰⁸ *Musical Courier*, February 6, 1907, 24.

Mahler the Enigma

America: A Setting for Success

In conversations with his colleague Maurice Baumfeld, Mahler professed his mission to “create in New York a higher musical understanding.”¹⁰⁹ Hired with the intent of bringing his European culture to America, Mahler made it his personal intention to create a cultural phenomenon: he wanted to raise America to the cultural standard in Vienna. Mahler, like many other European cultural “imports,” did well in New York City precisely because it was the new world; America did not yet have a cultural elitism comparable to Europe’s. Though very much contingent on socioeconomic wealth, American culture still had aspirations for democratic appreciation in that America had the opportunity to spread culture to everyone. Thriving on that ideal, Mahler brought his expertise and introduced the New York City audiences to music beyond Beethoven and Wagner through the historical concert series and a run of concerts focusing on different national styles. However, Mahler did not find as much success in America for his own works. When he performed his Symphony No. 2 with the New York Philharmonic in December 1908, he received only moderate acclaim. More than anything, reviewers criticized the intellectual design of the Second Symphony; this common opinion is indicative of the philosophical differences between Mahler and his audiences.¹¹⁰ New Yorkers could discern Mahler’s specific compositional choices, but they could not fully appreciate the symphony as a musical experience—his composition was not as accessible as his conducting. For the rest of his career, Mahler premiered his works in Europe where they would find critical success.

Ernst Jokl, an assistant conductor at the Metropolitan Opera for the 1909-1910 season, claimed that Mahler’s tenure in America was not comparable to his time at the Vienna Hofoper.

¹⁰⁹ Maurice Baumfeld, ‘Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler,’ *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung*, 21 May 1911, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 244.

¹¹⁰ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 305-7.

He argues: “In Vienna he had ‘brought out’ operas (*herausgebracht*)—the word should be taken at its most ordinary and literal, which here means more than an esthetic-critical treatment—in New York he ‘conducted’ (*dirigierte*).”¹¹¹ In Jokl’s opinion, Mahler’s role in America did not fulfill the musical integrity he had accomplished in Vienna. Because of his death, Mahler’s career was cut short, but speculations circulated about a return to Vienna. Jokl, in a later occasion in 1910, believed that Mahler “was still far from finished with Vienna and the Vienna Court Opera.”¹¹² Indeed, Mahler had always wanted to return to Vienna, which he considered his home, and he insisted on returning to Vienna to die, where his young child Putzi was laid to rest. One of Mahler’s physicians observed:

Mahler’s wish to die in Vienna was more than a matter of geography. His desire to return home was spiritual. Putzi was buried in the suburb of Grinzing, and Mahler wanted to be buried beside her. Indeed, in one of Alma’s accounts, she noted Mahler’s wish to be buried ‘in the same grave’ as their daughter.¹¹³

The return home to be buried with his daughter also signifies a wish to bury his past. Perhaps, driven away by Vienna’s social climate, Mahler aspired to establish himself in New York City so that he would return home as the unsung hero, the one to foster a transatlantic cultural standard.

In America, Mahler experienced less overt anti-Semitism than he experienced in Vienna. As K. M. Knittel pointed out, Viennese critics derided Mahler’s performances, especially his reorchestrated interpretations, and they often used language that evoked Jewish stereotypes.¹¹⁴ Anti-Semitism did have as strong a hold in American society:

Seen in economic terms, the Jew represented both the capitalist virtues and the capitalist vices. As the prototype of the aggressive businessman, the Jew stood for keenness and resourcefulness in trade. Yet keenness also meant cunning, and enterprise suggested avarice. . . . Later, in an increasingly secularized society, the

¹¹¹ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 715.

¹¹² La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 716.

¹¹³ La Grange, *Mahler Vol. 4*, 1231.

¹¹⁴ Knittel, “Polemik in Concertsaal,” 307.

whole religious image declined, and the unattractive elements in the economic stereotype grew more pronounced.¹¹⁵

In comparison to the Viennese critics' stereotypes, the American stereotype of the Jew focused on economic abilities and not necessarily intellectual aptitude. At the turn of the century, anti-Semitism was directed toward eastern European Jews. The deluge of immigrants at the turn of the century caused a stir among the established upper- and middle-class Americans.¹¹⁶ According to Leonard Dinnerstein, established Americans appropriated racist thoughts circulating among the European intellectual scene, and felt anxious about the future of the nation, fearing that the eastern European Jews could not fully assimilate.¹¹⁷

Though Mahler himself identified as an eastern European Jew, his status as a pseudo-member of the elite class gave him the privilege to avoid overt anti-Semitic discrimination. He came to America as a guest of the elite class—members of the cultural elite probably considered Mahler a German before anything else. Additionally, most of the culprits of anti-Semitic thoughts were not of the banking and cultural elite; the agrarian Populists, patrician intellectuals, and even members of the poor urban classes blamed the immigrant Jews for the growing economic strife during the Progressive Era.¹¹⁸ Representing the German cultural elite, Mahler could assimilate into the ranks of the wealthy. Free from his stigma as a Jew, Mahler in America had freer reign over his creative output. He could program his reorchestrated version of Beethoven without the inevitable disapproval of the Viennese critics, adamant in their standard for German music—though he did face criticism from some New York critics, namely Krehbiel. Another explanation for the inconsequential anti-Semitism he faced in America, Mahler could

¹¹⁵ John Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A reinterpretation," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43, no. 4 (Mar 1957): 563.

¹¹⁶ Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1994) 59.

¹¹⁷ Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 59.

¹¹⁸ Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age," 572.

easily shed this part of his identity in New York City because he was the music world's German import. As a European in America, he worked and flourished with this outsider's perspective.

New York City served as a hub for immigrants in America, and it became a symbol of the American spirit. In this city, immigrants could work diligently to make a better life for themselves. As a foreigner in America, Mahler embodied a certain aspect of this American work ethic, and he exemplified the perfect immigrant ambition: believing in the reward of hard work. Mahler was often noted, if not criticized, for his intense expectations, and he led meticulous and pain-staking rehearsals in order to obtain his musical ideal. In his farewell letter to the Vienna Philharmonic, Mahler stood up for his stern reputation:

I have always committed myself totally; I have subordinated my personal wishes to the cause, and my inclinations to my duty. I have not spared myself, and have thus acquired the right to demand of others that they exert all their strength.¹¹⁹

Mahler demanded much from his ensemble, but in the process he worked himself to an unhealthy level. At the end of his tenure in Vienna, he had been diagnosed with heart problems.

Though he expected to have a less strenuous work schedule in the New York City concert life, Mahler continued to work himself tirelessly. The position with the Philharmonic overloaded his schedule with rehearsals and a full concert season. Unwilling to recognize the strain of his many responsibilities, even up to his death, Mahler in an interview with the *New York Times* lauded the Philharmonic and the New York audience:

I am pleased with the results of my work here. . . . Things have been as satisfactory as could have been expected. The orchestra has improved from concert to concert, and the attitude of the New York public is always very serious and attentive.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Gustav Mahler in a printed letter to the Opera staff, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 205-6.

¹²⁰ Gustav Mahler for *The New York Times* 30 March 1910, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 232.

For Mahler to appreciate the “satisfactory” progress of the Philharmonic required an exceptional change in the work ethic of the orchestra, and the orchestra members rose up to meet Mahler’s expectations. Mahler valued the New York audience for its willingness to accept his musical ideal fully; even the many critics could entrust Mahler with the task of cultivating the American audience. Theodor Spiering, the concertmaster hired by Mahler for the New York Philharmonic, posthumously noted his maestro’s expectations and the orchestra’s response:

Mahler threw himself into his work with enormous enthusiasm. There were most careful rehearsals every day. He devoted all his energy to securing the hoped-for success for the re-organized orchestra. . . . Mahler always worked flat out. Every minute counted. There were no breaks. We almost never just played anything through. A constant struggle with recalcitrant matter until it was overcome.¹²¹

Spiering’s account of Mahler’s rehearsal process correlates with the complaints from the Vienna Philharmonic about his crippling perfectionism. Mahler did not have any qualms about drawing attention to a single musician or section in order to refine the music. While the Viennese ensemble nearly drove Mahler out of his position, the New York Philharmonic had a more favorable reaction:

The orchestra, somewhat reserved at first—they were not used to this intense manner—soon fell in with him and admired the man who treated them so brusquely and at the same time swept them along to undreamed-of peaks of achievement. As an interpreter Mahler is probably unmatched.¹²²

In Vienna, Mahler often faced resistance from his orchestra, but in America the musicians were appreciative of his rigor. Working around union schedule, he used every single minute the orchestra had to offer. Together, they faced the challenge of creating a symphonic tradition in America. Deepening the city’s musical culture, Mahler’s success and legacy correlate with his tenure as a conductor for the Philharmonic, now a world-renowned musical institution. His

¹²¹ Theodore Spiering, “Zwei Jahre mit Gustav Mahler in New York,” *Vossische Zeitung*, 21 May 1911, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 227.

¹²² Spiering, “Zwei Jahre mit Gustav Mahler in New York,” 227.

presence and authority in New York City influenced the creation of its own permanent orchestra, entrenched in the habits and routine unique to Mahler's conducting style. In this manner, he flourished in the setting of New York City because he was admired for his rigorous work ethic, a characteristic of which Americans felt proudest. Though an outsider as a European, Mahler found his place as an American.

In a letter to Alexander Zemlinsky, Mahler professes the triumph that he and Alma enjoyed while living in New York City:

We have both greatly enjoyed it here; we find the freshness, healthiness and openness of everything here very attractive. There is *future in everything*. I shall tell you more about it when I see you.¹²³

In this letter, one can feel the overwhelming power that the city had on Mahler; he is captivated by the implicit newness of the New World, with its bright future and promise. Here he can bring his intellectual genius, cultivated by the European standard, and he can fully realize his musical ideals. The Janus-faced Mahler can look back to the Music of the Past—Vienna, absolutism, and formalism—and look forward to the Music of the Future—New York City, program music, and modernism.

Scholars must continue to balance the competing views of Mahler to develop a clearer image of him and his accomplishments. While Mahler's compositions have been studied in detail, his work as a conductor both in Vienna and New York City have yet to be fully integrated into Mahler studies. This paper has demonstrated the value of a detailed study of the New York critics' reviews and the city's cultural life. Clarifying Mahler's artistic goals, this paper has shown the independent yet interconnected ideology behind his dual role as a composer and a

¹²³ Gustav Mahler in a letter to Alexander von Zemlinsky, in *Mahler: His Life, Work, and World*, ed. Kurt Blaukopf and Herta Blaukopf (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), 214.

conductor. Future work in this area can incorporate other influential voices in Mahler's life, such as Guido Adler and Richard Strauss. A thorough reading of all the reviews concerning Mahler's conducting in New York City—not just three periodicals—would give a more precise picture of Mahler's impact on the American musical culture. Mahler's lasting legacy rests on the paradoxes he embodied: formalist and modernist, absolutist and programmatic, elite and folk. His career led him to work as both a progressive composer and a traditional conductor, an enigma at the turning point of a new century.

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